Clearing the Fog:

Debunking Misguided Defenses of Scholars' Errors on Photography

Written by:

Abdurrahmaan bnu Meehoob al-Qaddaary

Introduction

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، الحمد لله رب العالمين، وصلى الله على نبينا محمد، وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين،

To proceed:
Photography is a widespread disease, that of animate objects of course, not all of it.
The fact that it is so common, and even used by some scholars, or worse: encouraged, makes people look at you like you came from Mars. “Who are you even, and what is this nonsense your mouth just uttered”?

If you’ve recently started learning Islaam, and working on actually applying it, then you will inevitably run into people who will challenge what you say about the ruling on photography, and all of them will use specious arguments, because there is literally no way they have any truth behind their claim, and this has been objectively proven.

You of course will be confused and not sure how to respond, and you might ask:

1. Many scholars today permit photography and videos, how could people believe what I say? It’s my word against theirs.

2. If scholars say video is not tasweer, how can I argue otherwise without disrespecting them?

3. Can I say that some scholars did not fully understand the technology? Would that be claiming they issued fatwa based on ignorance?

4. How do I reply to the claim of photography being beneficial in lectures and so on?

5. How do I address cases where people hold on to a scholar, like Ibn Uthaymeen, and find it hard to believe he issued a ruling that is incorrect?

Well, brothers and sisters, fear not, you know you are right, you only cannot navigate those claims and reply to them while still convincing people that this widespread phenomena is actually wrong, even if its is endorsed by some scholars.

The following will, inshaa'Allaah, help you see a detailed illustration on how those arguments are false, and how to counter them.

The first thing the two sides must agree on is: Tasweer is a major sin, just like alcohol, fornication, riba, and so on.

If they don't agree, then these people are opposing the same scholars they are holding on to. If they still don't retreat after they realize even their scholars oppose them, then there is nothing you can do. Stop, and save your sanity.

If they do agree, then that's better, but not good, because Allaah has not put benefit in what He made haraam. By their logic, we should use haraam if we think it has benefits.

That is if it has any benefits, because what they claim about photography...has no basis, it's purely a claim. Unless they consider people liking the material better with haraam decorations as a benefit, then also stop arguing with such people.

How are we sure there are no benefits?

Well, along there being no clear benefits listed by them, except the general claim of "it benefits people", we also

know that Islaam was transmitted 14 centuries without images, and now they're claiming: It's OK to use a major sin even though we didn't need it for whole 14 centuries.

Can you see how ridiculous it sounds?

That is one of the reasons why you are confused as to how to respond to such thing, your brain can’t accept they’re making such claim.

Now let’s move on to their use of "These scholars said it's ok".

Again, I do admit that it's heavy on most people to deal with this reality: Photography is so widespread and used, how do you people say it is haraam?

But, like shaykh Yahyaa al-Hajoory said: "Don't be fooled by the widespread of falsehood, because it being common is not a justification".

ولا يغرنكم كثرة الهالكين.

Back to the their claim, they, for example, say scholars say: “video recordings are not tasweer”, from the scientific side of what a video is, so how can you claim these scholars are issuing a fatwa based on ignorance? Because you say they have no idea what photography is.

Well, my friend, this is a pickle, unfortunately. It now depends on how willing a person is to seek the truth.

And you'll likely have to accept that many won't, and would rather imitate those scholars.

But you have two strategies.

The first: Name the scholars that do consider, for example, video as tasweer, and then the situation becomes about following the one with more knowledge on that specific matter and whether his saying agrees with that of photography experts.

The second: Tell them yes, they did issue these fataawaa based on ignorance, and that is normal, scholars are promised by Allaah one reward if they make a mistake, and two if they are correct. Allaah wouldn’t say this if scholars can’t make mistakes.

No one other than the Prophet ﷺ is to be followed blindly. Even al-imaam Maalik said: If my books contradict a hadeeth, then throw my books and follow the hadeeth.

Of course you don't have to say the exact same thing, but you get the idea: Scholars are not immune to mistakes, and it's normal for them to make mistakes. Phrase your statements based on your audience, may Allaah guide them, you, and me.

Shaykh at-Tweejry once wrote a response to shaykh Ibn Uthaymeen, disagreeing with him on an issue. Ibn Uthaymeen received the book, read it, and agreed that he indeed made a mistake. He even wrote an introduction to that book that says he was mistaken.

Do we say Ibn Uthaymeen cannot make fatwa based on ignorance, and follow his mistaken saying? Did ibn Uthaymeen say: I never make fatwa based on ignorance? Of course that is not true, it's actually a big mistake to say so.

Only the Prophet ﷺ is to be followed blindly.

Also, shaykh ar-Ruhayly literally admits the issue of videos is not certain for him, it is a shubha (an uncertain matter), and he actually **DOES NOT** advise using videos.

He also literally says: The more I read about tasweer **SCIENTIFICALLY** the more I lean towards prohibition with more clarity.

Do you think contemporary scholars are no where near the companions?
Then please continue to see how wrong it is to hold on to a scholar’s saying and refusing to admit that they are contradicting clear objective proof.

There's a narration from Ibn Abbaas, which is perfect for this situation:
His fatwa once contradicted that of Umar and Abu Bakr, may Allaah be pleased with them all, and people kept telling him that, and he was telling them that his fatwa is what the Prophet ﷺ did.

People kept saying: But Umar and Abu Bakr said otherwise.

So he told them: “You people are about to have rocks thrown at you from the sky...I tell you the Prophet did so, and you tell me Abu Bakr and Umar!!!!”.

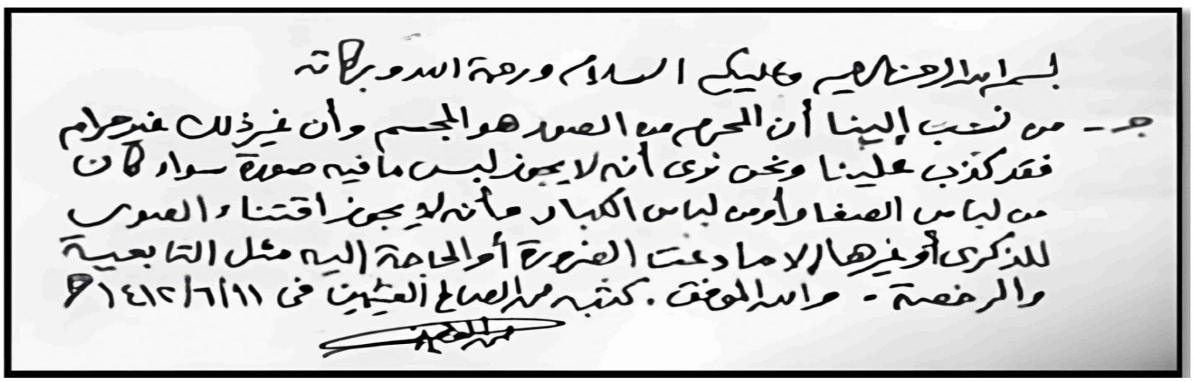
Who is ar-Ruhaly compared to Abu Bakr, my brothers and sisters in Islaam?

Finally, a lot of people claim al-Imaam Ibn ‘Uthaymeen declared photography as permissible, however, here is what he says:

«بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وعليكم السلام ورحمة الله وبركاته

جـ — من نسب إلينا أن المحرم من التصوير هو المجسم وأن غير ذلك غير حرام فقد كذب علينا ونحن نرى أنه لا يجوز لبس ما فيه صورة سواء كان من لباس الصغار أو من لباس الكبار وأنه لا يجوز اقتناء الصور للذكرى أو غيرها إلا ما دعت إليه الضرورة أو الحاجة إليه مثل التابعية والرخصة — والله الموفق . محمد الصالح العثيمين في ١١ / ٦ / ١٤١٢ هـ

[توقيع الشيخ]».


بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وعليكم السلام ورحمة الله وبركاته
جـ - من نسب إلينا أن المحرم من الصور هو المجسم وأن غير ذلك غير حرام
فقد كذب علينا ونحن نرى أنه لا يجوز لبس ما فيه صورة سواء كان
من لباس الصغار أو من لباس الكبار وأنه لا يجوز اقتناء الصور
للذكرى أو غيرها إلا ما دعت الضرورة أو الحاجة إليه مثل التابعية
والرخصة - والله الموفق. كتبه محمد الصالح العثيمين في ١١/٦/١٤١٢هـ

Bismillaahi ar-Rahmaani ar-Raheem, wa 'alaykum as-Salaamu wa rahmatu Allaahi wa barakaatuh

A – Whoever attributed to us that what is forbidden regarding photography is only the three-dimensional (sculptural) and that other forms are not forbidden, has lied about us. We believe that it is not permissible to wear anything containing an image, whether it is children's clothing or adults' clothing, and it is not permissible to own images for remembrance or other purposes except in cases of necessity or need, such as for identity cards or driving licenses. And Allaah is the One who grants success. Muhammad as-Saalih al-Uthaymeen on 11/6/1412 AH.
[Signature of the Shaykh]

وصلى الله على محمد، وعلى آله وصحبه. وآخر دعوانا أن الحمد لله رب العالمين.